

PIPS has been by far the most challenging and rewarding opportunity of my undergraduate career. Not only did PIPS present me with a deep insight into the policy making process, it also pushed me to refine practical skills—such as using concise prose and effective time management—which I will carry with me for years to come. More importantly, this program challenged me to be my very best—to think more critically, to conduct more in-depth and precise research, and to take my passion for international security and use it in a way that can actually give back to society.

At its very core, PIPS is a unique opportunity for students to take what they are studying in the classroom and learn how to practically apply it to real policy problems. Throughout my undergraduate education, I've found that students are often times taught more about how the world works rather than how to work within the world. PIPS, on the other hand, forces students to operate within real-world constraints to design both feasible and innovative policy proposals. Moreover, PIPS emphasizes creativity and original thought. Unlike many educational alternatives, students are encouraged to think outside of the box and to dive into complex foreign policy puzzles.

These obstacles are not the only ones students must overcome while undergoing the PIPS process. Before a project can even be decided upon, students must do a tremendous amount of canvassing and research to find 1) a policy puzzle that can be “tackled” within the school year and 2) an opening for something original to be said. And trust me, that's only the beginning. But I can honestly say that it's that level of difficulty that makes PIPS such a rewarding opportunity. Both the friendships fostered through working with other equally motivated students and the feeling of accomplishment following presentations in D.C. is truly invaluable. At the very least, PIPS enables students to realize that—with hard work and dedication—their potential is, in fact, limitless.

Furthermore, the reach of PIPS far exceeds those who simply participate in the program. Not only does PIPS serve as a starting point for foreign policy discussion among the WM student body, it also sets a standard of work for others to aspire. I still remember the awe I felt when first exposed to this program my sophomore year. I was so impressed with both the quality of research presented and the way the fellows conducted themselves that I knew right then and there that PIPS was a program that I *needed* to be a part of. PIPS became the standard I held myself—and quite frankly, still hold myself—to.

If anything, my participation in this program has fostered within me a much greater respect for the policy community. I now more thoroughly understand the constraints policy makers face and deeply appreciate for the amount of work they do. For these reasons, PIPS has inspired me to pursue a career of public service and to continue to conduct policy-relevant research following undergrad.

In my opinion, PIPS stands at a strategic intersection between the policy community and academia. Despite sharing a similar passion for world events, these two cultures have remained relatively distinct and separate. PIPS, however, can potentially serve as a mutually-beneficial bridge between these two communities. Not only do PIPS-like programs enable the policy community to capitalize on research academia has to offer, it also encourages the academy to start thinking about the policy challenges facing our nation and to conduct research that would be more useful to the policy community.

With support and replication, I can only imagine what PIPS-like programs could accomplish. This year, for instance, we were lucky enough to have panels with members of policy community, and one such panel served as the inspiration for my own project. As such, the advantage offered through closer interaction with the policy community, along with the ability to work with and feed-off of more equally talented students, is exceptional. The truth is that although each policy brief produced has only one name on it, PIPS and everything it entails is truly a team effort. In fact, I very strongly believe that through communication between the younger generation, the policy world, and academia now, we can better prepare ourselves to understand and manage the foreign policy obstacles that lie ahead of the United States.